

## A HERO FROM ERIN.

THE BATTLE RECORD OF GEN. THOMAS W. SWEENEY.

How an Irish Peasant Boy Became an American General—Doing Deeds in Mexico, on the Plains and in the War for the Union.

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dawning, the other the climax of an Irish exile's career. The pathway between was not all sunshine or there would be no romance to follow, and of course was not all veiled in clouds.

General Sweeney landed in New York in the thirties, in a family of exiles from the famine stricken island, and after a few years of study in the public schools took up the printer's trade. Those were the days of general training, when the national militia made some show of keeping the law, and every large city boasted numerous companies of organized soldiery. Sweeney enrolled himself in a band known as the "Baxter Blues," and proved so good a soldier that at the beginning of the Mexican war he was elected a lieutenant in the Second New York volunteers. That regiment marched and fought with Scott from Vera Cruz to the City of Mexico, and Sweeney was in every battle up to Churubusco. He was wounded there in the fierce attack led by Gen. Shields against the flank of Santa Anna's army while the regulars fought Shields with unusual desperation in order to save their main line from a foe in the rear.

The New Yorkers made a brilliant charge, lost heavily and came out covered with glory. Sweeney's right arm was shattered above the elbow and was amputated at the shoulder. On his arrival in New York he was given a public reception at Castle Garden theater, then the arena for great ceremonies, and was loaded with honors. Of course the hand buried at Churubusco could no longer stick type, and Uncle Sam kindly recognized the hero staff behind that empty sleeve with a commission in the regular army.

There was work in those days for the regulars in making the far, far west habitable for the venturesome white man, and Sweeney's regiment—the Second infantry—was in the California gold fields almost as soon as a pick was stuck in the yellow earth in 1849. The regiment was on the Colorado a couple of years and built Fort Yuma as a stronghold against the Coyote and Yuma Indians, who kept the warpath constantly, capturing and distressing the settlers, if they did not do worse. In the summer of 1851 the Indians got between the fort and the military base at San Diego, and the garrison was cut off from supplies. The commander saw no way out but to fall back to San Diego, but didn't intend to give up the fort to the redskins. Sweeney was a lieutenant in one of the companies, and with a detachment of ten men was left to hold the fort until the main body could march to San Diego and bring back help and material.

The retreating garrison was followed up by Indians, and shortly the country between Fort Yuma and San Diego swarmed with hostiles. Sweeney's band was under siege from June 5 to Dec. 6, and would have held out until promised help came or starvation or massacre overtook them but for the timely arrival of a force of soldiers from a quarter unsuspected by the besiegers. A government exploring expedition under military escort happened at the time to be at work on Colorado river remote from the scene of trouble, and on giving up their searches for the winter retired by the way of Fort Yuma. The explorers were well provided for the march, and the two parties united made their way to the military posts in spite of the redskins.

The exploit put Sweeney's name a peg higher at the war office, and in 1861 he was captain of his company. In April he was assigned to duty at the St. Louis arsenal under a major of southern proclivities. During the excitement following Sumter the seceders of the state tried to get possession of the arsenal and the immense quantities of arms and ammunition stored there. The major resigned, leaving Capt. Sweeney in charge with about forty soldiers, who were raw recruits, to hold out against thousands of hostile citizens. Proposals backed by threats, were made to the gallant soldier, and he finally told his persecutors that before he would yield the post he would blow it all to atoms.

The seceders concluded to wait for a more favorable turn, and meanwhile Capt. Nathaniel Lyon reached St. Louis with reinforcements and the arsenal was saved. Sweeney was second in command to Lyon in the Camp Jackson affair and afterward helped organize the three months' volunteers and was appointed brigadier general in the three months' service. His brigade fought at Wilson's Creek, and he succeeded Lyon in command on the field after that hero was killed.

On the expiration of his term in the militia Sweeney accepted the colonelcy of the Fifty-second Illinois regiment, and led it in the Donelson campaign. At the battle of Shiloh he commanded a brigade in the division under Wallace, which went to the relief of Sherman's troops on the first day. At a critical time Sherman called upon one of his colonels to take a regiment to an exposed position between the fighting lines and hold it at all hazards, in order to keep the Confederates from seizing it. The colonel hesitated and pleaded ignorance of

the duty required until it seemed as though the opportunity would be lost, when Sweeney, who was standing by, saluted the general and exclaimed, "I understand perfectly what you want; let me do it."

"Certainly, Sweeney; go at once!" said Sherman, and he afterward declared that the result was more important than any of the hundred achievements alleged to have "saved the day" at Shiloh. Sherman didn't forget the deed either.

After the Shiloh and Corinth campaigns Sweeney received a general's star and was assigned to a division of guards and garrisons along the railroads in western Tennessee and northern Mississippi. The service was the most difficult and arduous that could fall to the lot of a soldier. The region was another Shenandoah valley, peopled with zealous Confederates and a favorite stamping ground for the wild raiders led by Forrest and others. While incursions could not be prevented in a territory so vast and inviting, the roads were held and travel kept open between the Union front and the north and between the separate camps, and many a desperate battle was fought to attain that end.

When the army started for Atlanta in the spring of 1864 Sweeney's division went to the front in the Sixteenth corps in McPherson's Army of the Tennessee. During the advance beyond Resaca Sweeney took the lead in McPherson's column and adroitly seized the crossing of the Oostenaula at Lay's Ferry in the presence of a powerful body of Confederates, and held it until bridges were put down and the army safely across on the flank of the retreating enemy.

In two years of campaigning Gen. Sweeney had proved that he was a capable commander as well as a fighting hero. But his chance to head a large body of men in a desperate battle didn't come until the armies locked horns at the gates of Atlanta, late in July. For several days the Sixteenth corps was in reserve and on



GEN. SWEENEY AT THE BATTLE OF BALD HILL. The 21st marched to the extreme Union left to extend the line around the city. Sweeney's division spent the night in bivouac in rear of the Seventeenth corps, and Gen. McPherson shared the tent of the Irish hero. Plans were laid for the morning, and on the morning of the 22d the division marched off toward the extreme left to wheel into line beyond the Seventeenth corps, and halted in open field on Bald Hill, to await further orders.

Suddenly about noon Gen. Sweeney discovered troops of the enemy marching across the ground he had been directed to occupy, and sent out skirmishers to engage them. The firing alarmed the Union chiefs, and McPherson rode to the front, as did also the commander of the Sixteenth corps. Before new dispositions could be made a Confederate corps, led by General Hardee, burst from the woods into the open field and dashed three or four lines deep upon the flank of the Seventeenth corps to roll up the line. An eyewitness says that Sweeney's division sprang to arms like magic, the batteries unlimbered on a knoll where they happened to be resting, and before the bold assailants had time to recover their surprise at the presence of this unlooked for danger they were met at close range by a storm of bullets and canister that sent them back to the cover of the trees. Again and again they re-formed and charged. At the third repulse Gen. Sweeney gathered up three regiments and led them with fixed bayonets against the broken Confederate ranks.

After looking on at the repulse of the enemy by Sweeney, Gen. McPherson rode out beyond the new left flank to find a brigade that he had hastily ordered there in support of Sweeney. He unwittingly rode into the enemy's lines and was shot down, a noble sacrifice for the army and the nation and a personal loss to Gen. Sweeney at the time. In the excitement of the hour the general commanding the Sixteenth corps rode up to Sweeney's line and peremptorily detached several regiments by giving orders direct to the colonels and ignoring the division and brigade leaders altogether. His action broke up the division, and it subsequently fought in brigades and detachments, but always successfully, capturing cannon, flags and prisoners.

A second cloud settled upon Gen. Sweeney's fortunes in 1866 as a result of his love for the land of his birth. The Fenian brotherhood numbered him among its adherents in common with most of the distinguished sons of Ireland in the Union camps, and he was chosen to head the Irish forces for the invasion of Canada. He had reached the rank of brigadier general in the regular army, and resigned that exalted and honorable position to fight for the banner of green. A force of 40,000 men was promised him, but when the clans mustered on the Canada border there was not a good division on all the line between St. Albans and Buffalo.

Yet the die was cast, and the general crossed over at Buffalo with Col. Neill's detachment, aided in the attack on Limestone Ridge, and shed blood for the cause. It was a fiasco of the most disastrous sort, and the whole movement went to pieces, and the repulse was not ungrateful to the heroic exile, and he was soon afterward restored to full rank in the army and placed on the retired list. So he died a soldier in the enjoyment of a rank earned upon a score of battlefields.

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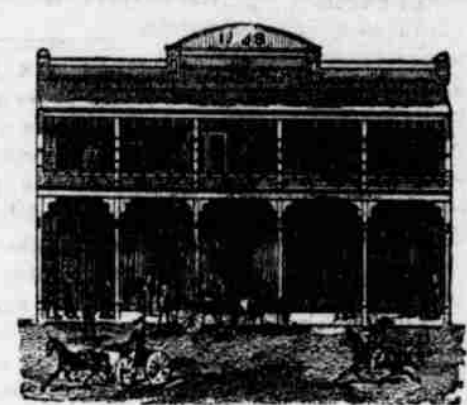
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